United Nations S/PV.7446

Security Council

Seventieth year

Provisional

7446th meeting
Tuesday, 19 May 2015, 3 p.m.
New York

President:	Mrs. Murmokaitė	(Lithuania)
Members:	Angola	Mr. Lucas
	Chad	Mr. Gombo
	Chile	Mr. Olguín Cigarroa
	China	Mr. Wang Min
	France	Mr. Delattre
	Jordan	Mrs. Kawar
	Malaysia	Mrs. Adnin
	New Zealand	Mr. Van Bohemen
	Nigeria	Mr. Adamu
	Russian Federation	Mr. Safronkov
	Spain	Mr. González de Linares Palou
	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	Mr. Rycroft
	United States of America	Mr. Pressman
	Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	Mr. Suárez Moreno

Agenda

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

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The meeting was called to order at 3.05 p.m.

Adoption of the agenda

The agenda was adopted.

The situation in the Middle East, including the Palestinian question

The President: In accordance with rule 39 of the Council's provisional rules of procedure, I invite Mr. Nickolay Mladenov, Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General, to participate in this meeting.

The Security Council will now begin its consideration of the item on its agenda.

I now give the floor to Mr. Mladenov.

Mr. Mladenov: I am honoured indeed to address the Security Council in my new capacity as the Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and Personal Representative of the Secretary-General to the Palestine Liberation Organization and the Palestinian Authority.

At the outset, allow me to thank President Abbas and his Government for their warm welcome and genuine interest in working with the United Nations in advancing the just cause of peace. I would like to also express my gratitude to the Government of Israel for its warm reception and for engaging on a host of important issues related to the situation on the ground. Since taking up my assignment, I have engaged with Palestinian and Israeli leaders. I have also met with political, civil society and business stakeholders in the West Bank and Gaza and with key partners in Egypt and Jordan in order to begin developing a better understanding of the reality on the ground and the prospects for the future.

The Middle East faces a vicious tide of terror and extremism that presents a serious challenge not just to the region, but also to international peace and security. However, the inability to respond for over 60 years now, both to the legitimate aspirations of the Palestinian people for a State and to Israel's quest for security, has fuelled a situation that is becoming more dangerous by the day. Generations of Palestinians and Israelis have come to realize that sustainable and just peace cannot be reached through conflict, but must be the result of negotiations. Thousands of people have died so that today we may hold this truth — that peace cannot be achieved through violence, but at the negotiating table — to be self-evident.

This hard-earned belief in peace and negotiations must not be allowed to wither away. If it does, it could further destabilize the Middle East for decades. To save it, to give hope back to people, we must act to advance the prospect of a two-State solution: Israel and Palestine living side by side in peace and security. How to do this is not an academic question, but one that must be addressed by the parties on the ground, the international community and the United Nations as well.

I do not underestimate the difficult decisions that both parties will have to take. Nor should we underestimate the domestic challenges that Israeli and Palestinian leaders alike will have to overcome. The region is facing a complicated security threat. However, it is precisely because of the dangers that lurk in the Middle East today that both sides must show historic leadership and personal commitment to peace and negotiations.

I take this opportunity to call on the new Government of Israel to take credible steps, including a freeze of settlement activity, in order to promote the resumption of meaningful negotiations. Continued security cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli authorities remains a cornerstone of a peaceful resolution. Both parties must make every effort to build upon existing agreements, including the relevant Security Council resolutions, the road map and the Arab Peace Initiative, in order to gain momentum towards a final status agreement.√The Secretary-General stands ready to work with all in order to encourage a return to negotiations on the basis of an agreed framework.

On 14 May, the Israeli Knesset confirmed Prime Minister Netanyahu's new coalition Government. Its guidelines state that it will "strive for peace with the Palestinians and all our neighbours, while safeguarding the security, historical and national interests of Israel".

The Secretary-General and I will be engaging with the new Government to explore realistic options for a return to meaningful negotiations towards a two-State solution within a reasonable time frame. However, this goal is increasingly threatened by actions on the ground that exacerbate the divisions that exist between the two sides.

We are deeply concerned to see the advancement of settlement activities in East Jerusalem and the West

Bank on three occasions in the past month. On 14 May, tenders were issued for 85 housing units in Givat Ze'ev, south of Ramallah. On 6 May, the District Planning and Building Committee approved permits for 400 new residential units in the settlement of Ramat Shlomo, and, on 27 April, 77 tenders were issued for residential units in two other East Jerusalem settlements.

These announcements come at a sensitive time in which the international community is looking to Israel to demonstrate its readiness to engage with the Palestinians on building peace. There should be no illusions about the impact of these unilateral actions. They not only undermine the collective hopes of those longing for a just resolution of the conflict, but they again call into question the viability of achieving peace based on the vision of two States. Settlement activity is illegal under international law, and I urge the new Israeli Government to reverse these decisions and refrain from such action in future.

In the occupied West Bank, including East Jerusalem, tensions continued as Israeli security forces conducted some 265 search-and-arrest operations, resulting in the arrests of 294 Palestinians. In separate incidents in late April, three Palestinian men, including a 17-year-old boy, were shot and killed after reportedly stabbing and injuring Israeli security officers at checkpoints in Hebron and Ma'ale Adumin. On 25 April, a Palestinian man was suspected of intentionally ramming his car into a group of Israeli policemen in East Jerusalem, injuring four. On 11 May, an Israeli was injured in a reported stabbing attack near a West Bank checkpoint. And on 14 May, three Israeli youths were struck by a car driven by a Palestinian man close to Gush Etzion.

Despite repeated objections, the Israeli Government continues to demolish Palestinian homes and structures. During the reporting period, a total of 15 structures, which contained 33 residences, were demolished, leading to the displacement of 25 people, including 14 children. On 4 May, the Israeli High Court of Justice rejected a request by Palestinians from the Area C village of Susiya to freeze demolitions in the village. And on 10 May, an Israeli court ordered the demolition of eight buildings in the East Jerusalem neighbourhood of Semiramis. The United Nations once again urges Israel to cease such demolitions and displacements.

The United Nations also remains concerned about the recent moves to relocate Bedouin communities near Abu Nwar in the politically sensitive E1 area of the West Bank that may be linked to further settlement construction.

Turning to Gaza, I cannot but recall the shock of my first, very brief tour of the destruction of the Shujaiya neighbourhood. No one — I repeat, no one — can remain untouched by the scale of devastation, the slow pace of reconstruction, and the vast needs that exist in order to rebuild lives and livelihoods. Gaza is desperate and Gaza is angry: angry at the blockade; angry at the closure of the Rafah crossing; angry at Hamas, including for imposing an illegal "solidarity tax"; angry at the donors for not honouring their commitments to reconstruction — at everyone. There is a clear moral and humanitarian imperative not just for the United Nations and the international community, but primarily for the Israeli and the Palestinian authorities to prevent the implosion of Gaza. I particularly call on the factions on the ground to ensure that Gaza remains peaceful.

Despite the fact that the agreed ceasefire, brokered by Egypt, continues to hold, some security incidents have persisted during the reporting period. Three rockets were fired at Israel from Gaza on 23 April: one exploded in an open area in Israel and the other two fell short and exploded inside Gaza. On 3 May, militants fired another rocket which hit inside Gaza near the security fence, and Palestinian militants also test-fired 19 rockets at the sea. Thankfully, no injuries or damage were reported in any of these incidents, all of which we condemn.

In response to the rocket firing, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) conducted an airstrike in Gaza that damaged a Hamas military site, but no casualties were reported. The IDF also reportedly shot and injured nine Palestinians in Gaza: three fishermen whose boats were fired upon by the Israeli navy and six Palestinians shot while approaching the Gaza border fence. Three militants were also killed in separate incidents where smuggling tunnels collapsed.

Without genuine Palestinian reconciliation and unity, all efforts to improve the situation in Gaza will face major difficulties. On 19 April, a delegation of Palestinian ministers travelled to Gaza to begin a process to reintegrate public-sector employees, tens of thousands of whom have not received salaries for over a year. Discussions, however, broke down the following day.

Despite this setback, I welcome the determination of Prime Minister Hamdallah and his efforts to find a

solution to the problem of public-sector employees in Gaza. His commitment that no one will be left behind is an important guarantee. I encourage all factions to support these efforts. The United Nations also stands ready to work with all stakeholders and support the Government in mobilizing the necessary resources for this process.

A comprehensive reconciliation must include the Government of national consensus resuming control over the crossings of Gaza into Israel and Egypt. This is key to allowing more movement of goods and people and to the eventual reopening of the crossings. The responsibility for addressing these issues lies first and foremost with the Palestinian authorities. But it also rests partly with the United Nations and the international community, which must empower the Government to take up its leadership role in Gaza, including through the fulfilment of the donor pledges made in Cairo last October.

What is clear is that no approach that divides Gaza and the West Bank should be supported. Palestine is one, and the United Nations will work with determination to advance unity through its legitimate institutions.

The ultimate objective of the United Nations in Gaza is to see the lifting of all closures within the framework of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009). In the absence of such a fundamental change, the temporary Gaza Reconstruction Mechanism is the only option currently available to facilitate the entry of material and to enable the implementation of large-scale projects that can bring reconstruction, jobs and stability.

I can report that, as at 19 May, close to 85,000 of the 100,000 households in need of construction materials to repair their homes had received them. In addition, 85 of the 167 projects submitted and funded by the international community and the private sector have been approved; eight of those projects are currently under way.

All of these developments are positive but far from sufficient to address Gaza's reconstruction needs. The United Nations is working closely with the Israeli Ministry of Defence's Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories, the Palestinian Minister of Civil Affairs and donors to finalize arrangements to speed up reconstruction. I take this opportunity to thank all counterparts for their constructive engagement on these matters.

Turning briefly to Lebanon, Special Coordinator Kaag and members of the International Support Group for Lebanon met today in Beirut with Prime Minister Tammam Salam to discuss the current situation in the country. As of 25 May, the country will have been without a president for one year. This vacuum undermines Lebanon's ability to address the challenges it faces and jeopardizes the functioning of State institutions. Members of Parliament should fulfil their constitutional obligation to elect a President without further delay.

With almost 1.2 million registered Syrian refugees in Lebanon forming the highest per capita concentration of refugees in the world, we again call on the international community to urgently fulfil existing pledges and increase and expedite support to Lebanon as a matter of priority. It is important that the Government and United Nations counterparts work together to promote effective management of the refugee presence in line with international humanitarian and human rights law.

The Lebanese-Syrian border remains impacted by incidents and infiltration attempts by armed extremist groups, particularly as a result of the fighting in the Qalamoun region. The Lebanese Armed Forces have made considerable efforts to secure the border, with support from the international community. On 20 April, Lebanon received its first shipment of military equipment from France, financed by a $3 billion grant from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. This and other contributions by Member States are both necessary and welcome.

The area of operations of the United Nations Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL) remained generally calm despite the volatile situation in the Golan Heights. In their ongoing engagement with UNIFIL, both parties maintained their commitment to the cessation of hostilities and to the stability of the Blue Line. Israeli violations of Lebanese airspace continued on an almost daily basis.

On the Golan, clashes occurred between the Syrian armed forces and armed members of the opposition, as did heavy fighting between the different armed groups in the area of separation. Between 24 April and 5 May, fire from the Bravo side as a result of such fighting impacted across the ceasefire line. On 24 April, an Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) missile-launching unit fired four missiles eastwards, one of which crossed the ceasefire line. A couple of days later, the IDF informed

the United Nations Disengagement Observer Force that four persons carrying equipment had crossed the ceasefire line from the Bravo side and had been killed by Israeli security forces as they approached the technical fence. Those developments have the potential to heighten tensions and jeopardize the ceasefire between the two countries.

In conclusion, let me return briefly to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the coming period will be critical to the future of the peace process. The United Nations has repeatedly warned that maintaining the status quo is not tenable. It will inexorably lead to the continued erosion of living conditions for Palestinians and Israelis alike, and it will undermine the security and stability of all. My introductory meetings clearly demonstrated that, despite the prolonged absence of a political horizon, the sometimes poisonous rhetoric of incitement and the destructive actions of those seeking to undermine a return to talks, there remains a steadfast desire and determination to achieve an enduring agreement. Any resolution will require a comprehensive regional solution — conceivably with support from the reinvigorated Quartet — that includes greater engagement with key Arab states. However, while the international community has a critical responsibility to support a peace process, a lasting solution can be achieved only by the parties themselves.

I thank you, Madam President, for this opportunity to address the Council. I look forward to working with you, and to your guidance on the way forward. Allow me to place on record my gratitude to my predecessor, Robert Serry, for his tireless efforts in this position. I also want to thank the excellent team at the Office of the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Process and here in the Secretariat, without whom our work in the field would not be possible.

The President: I thank Mr. Mladenov for his briefing.

I now invite Council members to informal consultations to continue our discussion on the subject.

The meeting rose at 3.20 p.m.